

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PBOR MASS BL PE CI

SUBJC: BOLIVIAN MINISTER OF COORDINATION, GENERAL LECHIN, REPEAT
PRESIDENTIAL REQUEST FOR NEUTRALITY GUARANTEE IN LIGHT OF
POTENTIAL PERU-CHILE CONFLICT

EXDIS

REF: LA PAZ 5772

1. GEN JUAN LECHIN, BOLIVIAN MINISTER OF COORDINATION, CALLED ME TO HIS OFFICE ON OCT. 22 TO REVIEW WITH ME THE BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN ABOUT WHAT IT VIEWS AS AN ALMOST INEVITABLE ARMED CONFLICT BETWEEN PERU AND CHILE AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF BOLIVIAN TERRITORY AND AIR SPACE. IN EFFECT, LECHIN REPEATED THE POINTS MADE TO ME AND GENERAL ROSSON DURING THE CALL ON PRESIDENT BANZER SEPT. 5. GENERAL LECHIN REPEATED THE PRESIDENT'S REQUEST FOR A UNILATERAL US GUARANTEE OF BOLIVIAN TERRITORIAL NEUTRALITY. HE EXPLAINED THAT THIS COUNTRY'S MILITARY FORCES ARE UNABLE TO PROTECT ITS BORDERS AGAINST INCURSIONS BY LAND AND TO PROTECT ITS AIR SPACE FROM FLIGHTS EMANATING EITHER FROM CHILE OR PERU. HE NOTED THE EXTREME VULNERABILITY OF THE BOLIVIAN ECONOMY IN THE EVENT OF CUTTING OFF RAIL AND ROAD TRANSPORT FROM THE PACIFIC PORTS. HE SAID THAT THE BOLIVIAN ARMED FORCES HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE NARROW STRETCH OF LAND ON THE SEACOAST CAN BE EASILY BLOCKED BY CHILEAN ARMED FORCES AND THAT PERU WILL HAVE TO TURN INWARD BY LAND OR AIR INASMUCH AS CHILEAN NAVAL DEFENSES ARE FAIRLY ADEQUATE. LECHIN NOTED THAT IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE FOR BOLIVIA TO TURN TO ANY OTHER COUNTRY THAN THE US WHICH HAS A LONG TRADITION OF FRIENDSHIP FOR BOLIVIA AND WHOSE MOTIVES ARE
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NOT SUSPECT IN THIS COUNTRY. HE SAID IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TO

SOLICIT GUARANTEES FROM BRAZIL INASMUCH AS THERE IS GREAT CONCERN ABOUT BRAZILIAN HEGEMONY IN THE SOUTHERN CONE. LECHIN MENTIONED A GROWING NUMBER OF YOUNGER BOLIVIAN ARMY OFFICERS WHO ARE ADVOCATES OF THE "PERUVIAN MODEL." HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD "EVIDENCE" OF PERUVIAN INTERVENTION IN BOLIVIAN DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, SEEKING TO INFLUENCE EVENTS HERE SO AS TO BRING ABOUT A GOVERNMENT MORE IDEOLOGICALLY IN TUNE WITH THAT OF LIMA. WHILE BOLIVIA'S MAJOR CONCERNS ARE ABOUT THE LARGE MILITARY ACQUISITIONS IN PERU, IT IS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT GROWING CHILEN ARMS AND POSSIBLE USE THROUGH BOLIVIAN TERRITORY. GENERAL LECHIN INDICATED THAT IT WAS A FIRM POLICY OF THE GOB TO BE NEUTRAL, BUT THAT IT WAS UNABLE TO MAINTAIN THIS STATUS BY ITSELF.

2. I TOLD GENERAL LECHIN THAT HIS PRESENTATION WAS IDENTICAL TO THAT MADE TO ME AND GENERAL ROSSON, AND THAT THE PRESIDENT'S REQUEST HAD BEEN SUBMITTED TO WASHINGTON FOR CONSIDERATION AT HIGH LEVELS IN THE US GOVERNMENT. I TOLD HIM THAT WHILE I DID NOT HAVE AUTHORIZATION TO MAKE A FORMAL RESPONSE TO THE REQUEST, I HAD AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MY COMMUNICATION INDICATING THAT IN ALL LIKELIHOOD A UNILATERAL US GUARANTEE WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE. NONETHELESS IT APPEARED TO ME THAT WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO DISCUSS THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE RIO TREATY AND CERTAIN KEY ARTICLES WITH RELATIONSHIP TO BOLIVIA'S ANXIETIES. I SAID THAT I FELT I WOULD SOON BE RECEIVING OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS TO MAKE A FORMAL REPLY TO THE GOB ON THE SUBJECT OF ITS REQUEST FOR A GUARANTEE OF NEUTRALITY.

3. GENERAL LECHIN TOLD ME THAT THE CONCERNS WITHIN THE BOLIVIAN GOVERNMENT INCLUDING THE ARMED FORCES HIGH COMMAND WERE SUCH THAT SERIOUS CONSIDERATION IS NOW BEING GIVEN TO WHETHER THE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED IN 1975 FOR PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS SHOULD BE CANCELLED. HE CONTENDED THAT THE PRESIDENT, THE CABINET, AND THE ARMED FORCES LEADERSHIP SINCERELY WISH TO CONSTITUTIONALIZE THE COUNTRY BUT THAT THERE WAS DOUBT THAT THE NATION SHOULD RISK OPENING THE POLITICAL PROCESS AT A TIME WHEN ARMED CONFLICT WAS LOOMING ON ITS BORDERS AND WHEN IT NEEDED TO TURN ITS WHOLE ATTENTION TO A MORE ADEQUATE DEFENSE AND AN IMPROVEMENT OF ITS ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE. I SUGGESTED THAT SOME ELEMENTS WITHIN THE COUNTRY MIGHT OPPOSE ANOTHER POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS ON

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THE GROUND OF CONSTITUTIONISM, AND THIS MIGHT BE DE-STABILIZING. WHICH WAS THE OPPOSITE EFFECT FROM THAT WHICH THE GOVERNMENT DESIRED. GENERAL LECHIN SAID THAT THE DECISION HAD NOT BEEN TAKEN AS YET, AND THAT THE PROS AND CONS WERE BEING WEIGHED. WHILE HE DID NOT SAY AS MUCH, I HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT A FACTOR TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BY THE BOLIVIAN AUTHORITIES IN DETERMINING WHETHER TO HOLD ELECTIONS COULD WELL BE THE KIND OF RESPONSE THE GOB MAY RECEIVE FROM ITS REQUEST TO US

ABOUT ITS NEUTRALITY.

4. ACTION REQUESTED: IT IS OBVIOUS THAT I NEED TO HAVE PROMPTLY A FORMAL WASHINGTON RESPONSE TO GIVE TO THE GOB ON ITS REQUEST FOR A GUARANTEE OF NEUTRALITY. I BELIEVE AN ORAL REPLY WOULD BE ADEQUATE, AND WHILE I RECOGNIZE THAT A UNILATERAL GUARANTEE IS NOT POSSIBLE, I WOULD APPRECIATE AS FORTHCOMING A RESPONSE AS POSSIBLE BASED ON THE RIO TREATY WITH PERHAPS SOME SUGGESTIONS ABOUT US OR BOLIVIAN ACTIONS WHICH MIGHT BE TAKEN PRIOR TO A CONFLICT TO CLAM THE SITUATION. I MIGHT HELP IF I WERE TO BE AUTHORIZED TO INFORM THE GOB THAT SENIOR POLICY PLANNING OFFICIALS ARE TO VISIT BOLIVIA SOON AND WILL BE AUTHORIZED TO DISCUSS HIGH LEVEL POLICY MATTERS SUCH AS THE PERUVIAN-CHILEAN CONFLICT. I WOULD APPRECIATE HAVING WASHINGTON VIEWS ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ENTERING INTO SOMETHING CONSTRUCTIVE TO DRAW THE ATTENTION OF BOLIVIA, PERU, AND CHILE TOWARDS SOMETHING POSITIVE SUCH AS A REGIONAL PORT DEVELOPMENT PROJECT WITH COROLLARY RAIL AND ROAD TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES. WHILE I RECOGNIZE THE DIFFICULTY OF DEVELOPING AN INTER-AGENCY POSITION ON THE BOLIVIAN REQUEST, I DO FEEL THAT OUR REPLY NEEDS TO COME QUICKLY.

STEDMAN

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